Dating Will Graham Should Not Be This Hard

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Dating Will Graham Should Not Be This Hard

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Summary

Written for this prompt at the kink meme:- "Cracky prompt is cracky but-- Five times Hannibal tried to woo Will and failed. That trip to the opera? Will complained about the noise. That fabulous nine course meal? Will ended up having an allergic reaction. Etc. Make me laugh at our dapper doctor, anons."

Notes

Translation into Chinese here by Anja_shi .

A Date at the Opera

“Tell me Will, are you interested in music?” Hannibal asks. It is late, at the conclusion of another evening in his office when philosophy, psychology and the macabre have exhausted themselves as topics and therefore all that remains is comfortable silence. “Classical music, and opera specifically.” He is standing by the drinks cabinet tucked at the back of the room, a small secret in a room that has known many small secrets, a confidence he shares with those rare individuals who excite his interest – or his taste-buds. He pours himself a measure of scotch, offers one to Will. It is refused, as expected. Will does not like anything that might cause him to loosen the tenuous grip he maintains on his own control.

“I’m afraid the area isn’t my specialty,” Will replies. “I’m sure you’ve drawn your own conclusions about my social background.”

“Jack did provide me with certain information about you before we met,” Hannibal says. He drinks, savouring the notes of peat, oak and heather of a 25 year old Laphroig. In this, as with all else that goes into his body, he will accept only the finest. In this case the lower end of finest, but the more select spirits are kept with his wines at home, saved for special occasions. “I ask because I recently happened to acquire two tickets to Verdi’s Macbeth this weekend.”

Will’s eyes flick upwards, meeting his for the briefest of moments. “That sounds... nice. But busy?”

“I assure you one does not have to converse with the other patrons at these events.” For which he can be thankful. Even though opera does tend to draw a more cultured crowd, overdrawn exposure to the herd can still be tiring. He does not fault Will his social phobia at all.

“Then yes. I appreciate the chance to get out of the house.” Half a grimace. Dear Will can be so self-depreciating at times. A habit he will have to wean him out of. “Not good for me to stay too cooped up. Lets things fester.”

“Then I hope I can offer you a chance to air out that magnificent brain of yours.”

The opera itself is perfectly passable. Quite an adequate rendition, considering the expertise of the company and the quality of the pool of talent they have to draw from. That is not the problem with the evening.

Things begin satisfactorily enough. He and Will take their seats, the lights are dimmed, and the first act begins. That the opera is in Italian only means that he has an excuse to lean over and whisper details of this particular production into Will’s ear – he will not make assumptions as to his familiarity with Shakespeare. Hannibal is not familiar with the Louisiana state school system, but he would not have high expectations of it. To a certain extent it is irrelevant; he would take the opportunity to be close to Will either way. To put him off his guard, certainly. To cement the bonds of friendship, equally, but even for the unique

specimen of humanity that he is, there is something about Will that is particularly alluring. Whether it is the intriguing mixture of strength and frailty that predicts he will fracture in such interesting ways when pushed, or the potential for wanton violence that Hannibal intends to draw out of him, he can't deny that Will Graham is more interesting alive than dead.

Also it has been a long time since he last had sexual relations with someone without devouring them afterwards. It will be interesting to see how that variable affects the emerging picture that is the relationship between them.

Alas, things begin to go awry as the second act draws to a close with the banquet and Banco's ghost. It is well done; the atmosphere is close and claustrophobic, as much as the medium allows. Macbeth's fear is almost palpable. But he feels Will become tense and still beside him. His eyes are far away, seeing something else. One of his own ghosts, no doubt. Under other circumstances Hannibal would be pleased at this turn of events, at this clear evidence of the cracks in Will's façade, of the darkness beginning to seep through the walls of his forts. This is not good timing. He was enjoying this evening, enjoying murmuring his commentary and enjoying Will's bright-eyed interest. No. This might make Will more susceptible to his plan down the line, but it will not do for tonight.

"Will," he says, with a gentle hand on Will's arm. Then when this is ineffective, his fingers find the tender part of the thigh just above the knee and apply pressure. Hard. Will jerks and turns to look at him, blinking as if rising from a deep sleep.

"I... I'm sorry. I just..."

"There is no need to apologise. These most recent cases have been trying for you. It was unreasonable of me to expect the themes of this work not to dredge up similar memories. Perhaps you would prefer to leave?"

"It's more unreasonable to spoil your evening – you paid for the tickets," Will replies. He is a little pale, but the colour is returning to his complexion.

Still, Hannibal disagrees with his assessment. Having happened on one occasion it is more likely to repeat itself, and that would spoil the evening more than leaving entirely. He has seen iterations of this opera before. This was meant to be for Will's edification, and if he is not in any state to appreciate it they should not waste time here.

"I insist," he says, and so they make their way out of the building, careful of course not to disturb the other patrons. That would be rude.

A Date over Dinner

Hannibal does not think of Will as his protégé. That is too simplistic a term, and he does not want a student. What he is looking for, the creature emerging from its metamorphosis of psychological breakdown, is something more. Something... equal. Or if this proves impractical, he will settle for observing the fracture patterns as he drives Will into insanity. Both options have their allure. It is unusual sentimentality to admit that he would prefer the former.

He has never counted himself amongst the ranks of the common man, nor does he have any desire to. Intelligence is enough to set himself above the masses without taking into account his other tastes. Most people are both dull and mindless, and even though he is not weak enough to yearn for companionship, on this particular occasion with this particular individual, he can permit himself some fantasies. Fantasies of a partner.

It would not be seemly however for any true associate of his to remain uncultured. Will is not to blame for his upbringing, but it would be a waste of everything he has the potential to be, not to correct the gaps in his knowledge. Music, art, culture, and most importantly fine cuisine; these are all areas in which he hopes to stir good Will's interest, areas in which he is currently, regrettably, deficient.

The peccadilloes of the heart are curious things. Will Graham is certainly a unique individual, his gift unparalleled in scope or in its ability to trap him in the darkness he fears. But when he piqued Hannibal's interest the first time Jack Crawford laid his file upon his desk he had not anticipated how hungry he would become to taste the more intangible parts of that man. His regard and appreciation for the artistry of the kill, for example – and Hannibal's in particular, he must admit. It had been most gratifying to hear the compliments of Will's lecture, indirect and second-hand though they might have been.

Even a vague idea of domesticity ought to be laughable. He has no need for the trappings of an ordinary life outside the mask he wears. Still, he gives in to the urge to bring Will food often, outside the bounds of formal dinners with issued invitations that are his normal style. Perhaps that is why his second stab at winning fair Will's affections takes the form it does. Though whether he is refuting plain domesticity or playing further into it he is less keen to analyse.

He extends his offer of a five course dinner (more would, perhaps, be too daunting to Will's tastes) at the conclusion of their latest case; a man with a religious inclination and a flair for the artistic. Disappointingly it did not end with the opportunity for Will to kill again, but there will be others in the future. Hannibal has not gone this long uncaught without knowing the virtues of patience.

"I won't pass up a chance to enjoy your excellent cooking," Will replies, removing his glasses to clean them on his sweater for something to do with his hands. He seems pleased.

Hannibal considers the menu for the evening with great care. Because it amuses him to slip into the role of Abigail's father – a role she seems quite comfortable to see him in – he has lately been more conscious of using as many parts of his kills as are practical to keep, for one man eating mostly alone. For such a special occasion one carcass should adequately serve. The table settings must also be perfect. Candle light and intimacy. Will is often blind to the subtext of social interaction, and it would not do for him to miss this.

The amuse-bouche is cubes of brain, deep-fried and served with a green sauce of parsley, dill, anchovies and capers. It is a pity they are too soft to perfectly keep their shape. On occasion he enjoys geometry as a part of presentation, and with Will's need for order he suspects it might have appealed to his subconscious mind.

"What is this?" Will asks when they are brought out on their large serving spoons. Hannibal smiles.

"If I told you, I am not sure you would be willing to try them."

Will makes a face, but he eats all the same. Hannibal's blood flows hot with pleasure at his murmur of enjoyment. He explains the organ after the fact, but not, of course, the source.

As a soup course, porcini, pancetta and spelt simmered in a broth made rich with human bones and marrow. It is warm, hearty and perhaps more filling than necessary for a dinner of this sort, but there is something about Will that arouses the urge to feed him up. *Fatten* him up, if Hannibal had other plans for him. More of this uneasy compulsion towards the domestic.

"Where did you learn to cook?" Will asks him, between sips.

"In Paris," he replies, "where there is no shortage of capable teachers. Or perhaps you expected me to say that I sprung forth into the world already a master chef?"

Will laughs. "It is hard to imagine you as a young man, sometimes."

"I assure you that my first efforts were truly pitiful." Inexpert butchery, soaking himself in blood, puncturing the bowels by mistake, ruining his clothes... Yes, the first kills had been amateur, but he was nothing if not a fast learner.

"The next course?" he offers.

"Please." Will dabs his mouth with his napkin, a pleasing display of manners.

Now comes a slow-cooked bourguignon of biceps and heart, sweetened with brown sugar and red wine. Perhaps it is the colours of fall that suffuse the world recently, but he has found himself tending towards the theme of comfort in this meal. They do say that good food soothes the soul, and Will's could perhaps do with some soothing after the unfortunate incident at the opera house.

This too is well received. Hannibal has begun to have high hopes for the end of this meal – the thought of slowly fucking a Will sleepy with food has a certain appeal – but once again

fate intervenes with the fourth course.

This is a delicate roast from the lower back stuffed with chopped liver roasted in butter and garlic. All seems well until Will puts a hand to his lips, looking confused.

“What’s in this?” he asks. “My mouth feels... odd.”

“Will,” Hannibal says urgently. “Are you allergic to anything?”

“I thought only codeine, but... apparently not.”

Codeine, which is metabolised in the liver. Hannibal’s fist tightens around his fork. Once is bad luck, twice co-incidence. If another of his dates with Will (he calls them what they are) goes wrong he shall begin to suspect the hand of God.

An oversight; he does not have any source of adrenaline in the house. Therefore it is this turn of events that leads to him taking Will to the Emergency Room at 8pm at night, which is hardly fit for a seduction.

They did not even get to try the candied crackling.

A Date with Art

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Music has not sufficed for his attempts at seduction, and finding his way to Will's succulent heart with food had failed as well. The next area of refinement on his list is art. It is fortunate, therefore, that Baltimore has a number of excellent museums and galleries for him to pick from. If nothing else, the themes that underlie each work will provide topics for discussion. Philosophy and psychology are realms of commonality with dear Will; they provide fertile ground to plant the seeds of suggestion in their sessions, anchors of subtle manipulation. This is a slow seduction. To rush it would be to ruin it, but that does not mean he cannot move on to the physical before he fully realises the emotional. Or at least it would, if his plans were not so inclined to go awry.

He picks a weekend at the conclusion of their latest case; the Angel-maker. There will be plenty of angels arrayed on the walls of the Baltimore Museum of Art, but the classical is not the only purview of that institution. After the opera he is more wary. He has told Will that he does not think of him as fragile, and that is generally the case, but his plan for him certainly *is* fragile. This is a delicate path he makes Will walk, and to deviate might make him crack and fall before he is ready. So Hannibal will be careful. If the European collections trigger him in unfortunate ways, they will quickly move on.

Hannibal is sure that he will see the signs, now prepared for them, and be able to act. This is a high-wire act, but the transformation of his little mongoose that waits on the other side is well worth it.

"Are you free on Saturday?" he asks Will over the phone, the both of them knowing he is. Will is not sociable; he does not as a rule leave the refuge of his house unless he must.

"What did you have in mind?" Will replies, cautious but intrigued despite himself. Hannibal smiles. Already Will leans on him more than would he healthy, if health was anything he wanted. It pleases him to be needed by this otherwise fiercely independent man.

"I believe it would do you good to clear your head. Dwell on more pleasant thoughts than Jack would have you put into your mind. A trip to the Baltimore Museum of Art perhaps?"

Will laughs, and there is an edge of nervousness that Hannibal finds delicious. "Are you sure that's such a good idea? Art is not always... without its demons."

"But harder to pull emotions from than crime scenes, yes?"

"Yes," Will admits.

"Art is capable of showing you great beauty, not just the terrible."

A loud exhalation of breath. “I could do with some beauty that doesn’t come from the delusions of a psychopath,” Will says, with edged humour.

“Very well,” Hannibal replies. “I shall pick you up at ten in the morning.”

Half an hour’s drive into the city, with added time to find a place for parking, and they are just in time for opening. Hannibal is hoping to spend a few hours here, perusing the galleries and discussing those works with most merit, pausing in the sculpture garden to eat the lunch he has packed, before taking coffee in a particularly fine café he is familiar with. After that, he is prepared to be spontaneous. His plan for this date is less carnal than on previous occasions. He merely wants Will to become yet more comfortable around him. To permit him to invade his personal space to even greater extents, to tolerate gentle, ghosting touches. To unconsciously accept his presence as thought it were an extension of Will’s own body.

They are lucky – although it is a weekend the museum is not busy. Currently a number of the galleries are closed for renovation, which has undoubtedly put some visitors off. Still, he does not intend to spend the entire day here. Although he would enjoy it, he suspects Will would weary of being exposed to so many emotions crystallised in brush strokes, to say nothing of the closeness of the general populace.

Conveniently the European gallery is the first they enter on ascending to the second floor. Hannibal watches Will as much as he examines the art itself, adjusting the shoulder strap of the cooler so that it falls more naturally and does not wrinkle his suit. Inside are two containers of a thin-cut, slow-cooked shoulder roast salad with balsamic vinaigrette, a tub of sticky marinated ribs (with wet wipes to clean their fingers afterwards, of course) and a small box of exquisite chocolates from the finest chocolatier in the state. No codeine on this occasion, he has made *very* sure.

Portraits and religion, these are the typical subjects of the artists of the classical period. God has laid a deep imprint over the psyches of continents, providing the impetus for creation, for scenes of wonders and miracles. There is a certain irony to religion that Hannibal enjoys. It is a creed born of fear; fear of death, fear of pain, fear of the acts the powerful are capable of enacting on the weak that are so pettily called sins. God is their salvation, but equally powerful, the devil himself. Scapegoat for the brutality of the human condition. Salve to hypocrisy. Not, however, a figure who appears here, which is a pity.

“I’ve always found portraits unsettling,” Will confides to him in a low voice.

“Eyes that follow you around the room?”

That raises a smile. “More like a soul that does. Too much of the person caught up in them. I avoid studying people for a reason; I don’t particularly want to look at these ghosts either.”

Hannibal thinks it a testament to the way he has crept under Will’s skin that the man does not even notice how easily he drops these little hints into the workings of his mind. He doubts there is another person in the world that Will would so confide in, and the thought is warm and pleasant. He hopes to coax many other little secrets out of Will today. What better place?

Art has a certain subjectivity that reflects the observer, mirror-like. And Will has much of the mirror about him also.

He has another thirty minutes to begin to find out before the interruption comes. Will's phone rings, shrill and piercing. A simple and utilitarian tone, as befits his character. Will starts, and scrabbles in the pocket of his jacket for it.

"It's Jack," he says, looking irritated. Hannibal is severely tempted to snatch it out of his hand and hang up on the man, but Will still perceives that he has a duty, and he would not thank him for it.

Silently Hannibal fumes as Will carries on a hushed conversation, speaking softly in the way forced by museums and libraries and similar institutions. It will be another case. Again the universe has conspired to ruin his plans. It makes him desperately angry, but he does his best to quell it. He does not like to indulge in emotions when he cannot do anything about them.

Finally Will hangs up, and looks at him apologetically. "It's about the Chesapeake Ripper," he says. "There's been a murder at the Baltimore State Hospital for the Criminally Insane, and it seems to match the pattern of his last kill."

"Then you must go, of course," Hannibal replies, inwardly somewhat amused. So he has a copy-cat. Well, they will see how undoubtedly amateur the work of this admirer is before too long. It is almost a compliment. It is just infuriating that it had to be now. Couldn't the man have waited another day? It is very rude of him.

"I'm really sorry about this," Will says, and then he is off.

It is frustrating, but Hannibal cannot think of any immediately plausible excuse to go with him. Well, he will just have to enjoy the rest of the museum by himself. And he has a lunch crafted from a boorish art critic that it would be a pity to let go to waste.

Chapter End Notes

Of course it's different when they actually *believe* he's you...

A Date That Never Gets Started

Chapter Summary

Something of a filling in time chapter. More actual dates next chapters.

Dealing with Dr Gideon is less about punishing an ill-mannered and psychologically suggestible individual and more about more about making it very clear to those who feigned to buy into his lies that this will not be tolerated. For one, it makes frauds of them, which is an unpleasant thing to be, for another he does not appreciate their unsubtle attempt at manipulation. Hannibal would not necessarily call himself a proud man, but he left examples of his work where they would be found as lessons for the world at large. To attribute them to this stranger is to mock their meaning, mask the message beneath falsehoods and misunderstandings.

To avoid the obvious trap, he does nothing so rash as to illustrate his anger via murder. He sees in Ms Lound's article the heavy hand of Jack Crawford and so his punishment is tailored for him alone. Two years ago the man sent him a young trainee, a very clever girl who was far too close to finding the truth. Hannibal respected that intelligence, and so despite the necessity of killing her he had not taken from her that which she did not deserve. He consumed nothing. Instead he preserved her for some future use. It seems that time is upon him.

After Jack came to him so vulnerable and broken open by the reality of his wife's illness, it seemed appropriate to remind him of what else he has lost, something that could not have been far from his mind with this particular case. Now he takes that further. It seems appropriate. To waken the old ghost of guilt, to give hope and then snatch it away. That recording has been languishing in a half-forgotten file for some time. Hannibal brings it out into the light of day.

He is meticulous in this as with all things. Calls from Jack's home, hair on his pillow, fingerprints clear enough despite the inevitable degradation of ice. The subtle horror of invasion, violation of home and safety to set on top of that shiver of emotion marbled between hope and loss and anger. Coexisting, mixing without meshing, oil and water. A pity he can find little excuse to see it up close, but Jack will not easily put it aside. There will be time.

He is only sorry that this particular endeavour takes up most of his free time that would better be spent with Will Graham. They are the both of them busy people, and it is hard enough for Hannibal to arrange to see him outside of their scheduled conversations even without the constraints of circumstance or the interruptions of happenstance. Meeting the vulgar Dr Chilton, whom poor Will has been forced to spend some time with, makes him swear to make it up to him in some way. Were he a man who believed in karma, or indeed in conventional

morality, he might attribute his string of bad luck to that. But the universe is not so directed. It is a collection of random movements, chaotic, only made otherwise by the actions of humanity.

Jack comes to see him after his delivery of the arm. He speaks and Hannibal knows his punishment has worked. Soon afterwards the article on Tattlecrime has disappeared from the site's front page, shuffled off to some backwater of the archives. That much gives him some degree of satisfaction. He begins to consider what activity he ought next pursue with Will. Back to the gallery where they were so rudely interrupted, perhaps? Or perhaps the simple pleasures of a visit to the harbour, since he knows Will has an interest in boats? Or an art film at the Charles Theatre, though it would have to be one of the slightly more populist selections.

Whilst he tries to settle on which option will most fulfil his purpose of a slow and careful seduction, he does not mean to curtail his own appreciation of Baltimore's artistic scene. The benefit for Hunger Relief piques his sense of irony, not to mention stars a most exquisite singer who has proved a delight on several former occasions. A pity then that his good mood afterwards is soured by his patient Franklin breaking the bounds of good manners and propriety. Hannibal supposes that sometime soon he will have to pass him on to some other psychiatrist so that his name might find its way into his Rolodex. He would much rather eat the man than continue to listen to his mediocre neuroses.

Franklin has become dangerously obsessed with him. It is not that he has anything to fear – it is a yearning for the mystique he projects, for the control he has and that Franklin envies, a desire for personal validation from a superior being. Even if ignored and spurned Franklin's psychology is not given to violence. No, more dangerous is that in his tiresome stalking he will follow too long or at the wrong time, and see something he should not. Hannibal's instincts and awareness of his environment are excellent, but he is unfortunately not professionally trained in spotting a trail, and he will admit to a certain intensity of focus when a hunt nears its close that may blind him to unseen watchers.

It is clear that something must be done about Franklin. He is merely unsure as to quite *what*.

Although he had not particularly intended to set off another round of Ripper murders, the opportunity that presents itself with the fatal incidence of organ-harvesting is too good a one to pass up. Drinking with Will in his office, with the comfort of darkness swathing the windows glimpsed beneath the blinds, he enquires around the subject as is expected of him. Freddie Lounds has published another article about it, more equivocal than the last, and with no mention of her apparent miss-step with Dr Gideon.

Drawing Will's mind towards the most likely possibility also permits him the opportunity to confuse the trail for some short time, to muddle and distract attention for long enough to collect the materials for a truly wonderful feast. Although his acquaintances from Baltimore art circles will of habit and necessity be the main guests, he hopes to persuade Will to attend as well, although his hopes are not high. Social gatherings are not Will's forte. Still, he can dream of a time in the future, allow himself a moment of fantasy, when Will has assimilated

the culture that Hannibal inoculates him with, plays genteel host with him, accompanies him to events... yet still maintains his charming honesty and forthrightness in private.

A pleasant thought, but many miles to go before they reach that destination. He can only make the offer, futile though it may be.

In the meantime comes preparation. A taster session with Alana Bloom, to more firmly cement in his mind the menu he has planned. Flirting with her is an old habit at this point, not truly meant by either of them. They have known each other a long time, and he appreciates her beauty and her love of fine dining. He had thought, once, that things might briefly turn sexual, but both of them had realised it would have made further friendship impossible, and Alana liked him – or at least the socially acceptable version of him – enough not to want that. It is because he respects her that he gives her a gift of the beer that certain parts of Miriam Lass have been fermenting in for the past two years. If, symbolically, consuming another gives you access to their gifts, then Alana deserves Miriam's intuition and sharp intelligence. (He does not believe in such a thing himself. Indeed, with his chosen diet, what good qualities would there even be? Taking on their *other* qualities is a truly abhorrent idea.)

After that the kills and the collection of viscera accumulate quickly. His fridge is soon full of a plentiful harvest, as wide and varied a spread as befits any dinner that he would host. The FBI are stymied by the false scent he has placed them on, and he has nothing to fear.

He is... perturbed, when Will does not appear on time for his usual appointment. It is not like him to be late, and he is always well-mannered enough to call and cancel if Jack has snatched him off to some scene that requires his attention. He tells himself that it is merely concern for his safety that prompts the drive to Quantico in search of him, but acknowledges that his true motivations are deeper than that. He does not wish to draw uncomfortable parallels between Franklin's tenuous friendships and his own, but there is a superficial similarity. Franklin's manner puts people on edge. Hannibal does not let anyone see past his manner, his 'person suit', as Bedilia put it.

(She has known him a long time. She knows more of him that anyone else, even Will, although she is not aware of the entirety of the truth. She believes him one of those psychopaths whose nature allows them to excel at their work, much like all those bankers and lawyers and businessmen who have a facility with interpersonal relationships, drawing in clients, constantly manipulating their colleagues, never fettered by conventional morality. It is simplistic, but not *entirely* inaccurate.)

Will is somewhere between dreaming and hallucinating, staring ahead eyes open at nothing. It takes several repetitions of his name to rouse him, and it is clear all sense of time has been swept from him. Hannibal is relieved, he will admit, that it is not anything more sinister. Merely a consequence of his usual stresses, disordered sleep and insomnia. He must be forcing himself to stay awake, too afraid of what he will see. He will start having waking hallucinations soon.

It will be entertaining, if nothing else. He will settle for a broken Will if he has to, though something vicious and interesting might arise from the fracture. Or the break will heal, or

Will will merely bend and find some way to bounce back to true. Whatever the result, Hannibal will have him, one way or another. He will make it an inevitability.

Part of that is the scraps he throws to the hungry beast of Will's empathy and intellect. That beast needs no greater meal than that to sink its teeth into the outlines of Hannibal's psyche, reflected through those he has slain. The understanding comes with little persuasion to Will's mind, pours out in words that echo Hannibal's own thoughts. There's the scent of danger here but he can't back away from it. To be known so truly is, in some way, intoxicating. That is why he values Will, despite the threat he could yet come to be. He is... fond... of him.

Jack interrupts them with news. Their organ harvester has been located, and would Hannibal care to accompany them? Indeed he would. It is sure to be instructive.

If being so closely watched by Will as he used his skills to save a life instead of take one may be counted as a date, then Hannibal would welcome the chance to call it one. There had been a shock, a charge, which passed between them in a moment of eye contact, and it warmed him as he worked. Perhaps good Will has a fetish for competency. Or a medical one – and wouldn't that be interesting. Either way, Hannibal views it as a positive thing, that electric connection.

It is certainly more of a connection than he is likely to get tonight. The preparation for his dinner is in full swing; the guests will soon start arriving, and Will cannot be persuaded to stay, much as expected. He has brought a bottle of wine as a gift, which is a nice gesture even though it is plain he knows little about wine, and merely bought the most expensive bottle in the shop that was still within the limits of the amount it is reasonable to spend on a friend.

"I have a date with the Chesapeake Ripper," Will says, and Hannibal thinks, *If only*.

But for now he must let him go. He will have to make time for a one on one encounter soon. It has been far too long.

A Date in the Forest

Chapter Summary

> Sorry about the delay getting this chapter out. My muse has been... uncooperative. Also partly that pesky thing called studying. But I hope you enjoy this chapter, anyway.

The opportunity for just such a one-on-one encounter presents itself the following morning, although when Hannibal first leaves for Will's house he does not entirely intend for it to be a date, or not in so many words. After the dinner party had concluded, pleasant conversation drawing to a close over coffee, biscotti and thin mints, his guests leaving in a final swirl of compliments, taking up coats and disappearing into the night with promises and expectations for the next such event, he had dismissed the servers he had hired and taken stock. One of the many important considerations in arranging such a meal is the careful balance of courses and portion sizes with the appetites of the guests. It was always better to have too much than not enough. So naturally here are leftovers, of some dishes more than others, according to various personal tastes.

It seems appropriate then, to gather these up and set them in the refrigerator overnight, to take to Will the next morning. Since he could not come to the party, the party will have to come to him. Hannibal envisions only a simple breakfast, an occasion to monitor Will's mental state. To see how far he is slipping, to what degree he can push him further without risking utter collapse, without endangering him.

To imagine this as a date, in his mind, would show a certain lack of imagination. Although the common proverb stated that the way to a man's heart was via the stomach, Hannibal could say quite firmly that this was only indubitably true in the anatomical sense. (And assuming a weapon too unwieldy, or a situation too awkward, to cleanly pierce between the ribs.) His own appreciation for the culinary arts, whilst a central part of his life, was not the be all and end all, nor did he wish to let it confine him, or make him predictable. Food might be associated typically with dates, but a round of dinners would soon become dull and stilted without something else to leaven the air. He intended something more interesting for his next outing with Will.

That did not mean he could not seize opportunity, when such presented itself to him.

He had just parked in front of Will's house and was getting out of his car when the door opened and a small flood of hounds rushed through. Will Graham himself was not far behind them, wrapped up against the cold in practical, inexpensive clothes, if not necessarily flattering outside of the odd fact that Will managed to make the strangest items of apparel unexpectedly acceptable, even alluring. A worn knitted hat was pulled down over his curls, hiding his ears. It took him some short while to look up and notice that he was not alone.

“Ah. Hello. I... wasn’t expecting you.” The smile he gives, however, is welcoming enough. More so than it would be with many people.

“Perhaps it would have been wiser of me to phone ahead,” Hannibal replies, ignoring the dogs snuffling around his feet, shedding their hair onto his trousers. He has no particular love for animals. He has never truly understood the desire some humans have to keep them around them; whatever ornamental value they might have is far outweighed by the inconveniences that accompany them, and few use them for their original intended purpose of hunting. However, for Will’s sake, who seems to enjoy accumulating them in large numbers, he can bear their presence.

“No, no it’s fine,” Will replies.

“Have I caught you at a bad time?”

“I was just about to take them out for a walk,” Will says, gesturing to his pack.

“Then I shall join you,” Hannibal says, a sudden decision, but one that has immediate appeal. Although it will mean more time in the presence of dogs, doing such a simple, everyday task with Will is sure to create a feeling of domesticity, of closeness, a pleasant intimacy. One more small accretion onto the canvas, like a layer of paint. “Unless you think these clothes will not be appropriate attire? Perhaps there will be mud?”

When Will is with other people, he smiles little, and when it does it is a warning baring of teeth that never quite matches up with true human expressions. Hannibal takes a certain quiet delight that when Will is with him, his smiles always reach his eyes. “The mud freezes at this time of year,” he replies. “I don’t think you have anything to worry about.”

Will’s home is on the outskirts of Wolf Trap, outside the suburbs, attached to that line on an address simply by geographical proximity and a lack of suitable markers to assign it elsewhere. The woods and fields that surround the property merge seamlessly with rural farms, parkland and forestry. The trail they follow is reasonably well-trod, and the dogs trot back and forth along it, sometimes venturing out between trees, or down to lap at the ice-cold water of a small stream. It is... pleasant, Hannibal thinks, to enjoy nature in this simple manner. Normally he has little attention to devote to it, concentrating entirely on whatever prey he is hunting. Here he can walk in comfortable silence with Will, listening to the wind rustling leaves and branches, the hounds panting, the sound of their footsteps.

It is perhaps more the sort of pleasure that Will is accustomed to, and it is important, is it not, to take an interest in the pursuits of one’s partner? To be willing to share in their hobbies, up to a point. He is afraid that he would find fishing interminably dull, even with Will present. But walking with his hounds has a certain rustic charm that would be perfectly acceptable. Exercise is important for a healthy mind and a healthy body.

Not that he entirely wants Will to have a healthy mind, at least not at this point. Perhaps later, when he has had sufficient time to mould it, and let it set, fired in a fevered kiln.

As they turn back towards the house, Hannibal considers that this might be put down as a tentative date, and that if so, his streak of bad luck might be broken. It has gone well enough so far. When they return to Will's home, he will fetch the select leftovers from last night's feast from the back of his car, they will go inside and eat together, and what thereafter follows will depend on Will's schedule. He is hopeful that Will has the morning free.

However, fate is not so kind to him. The barking of the dogs first alerts them to the presence of trouble, bare yards from the house itself. Hannibal needs only to see the bright shock of red hair to identify the interloper on Will's property.

"Miss Lounds," he says, allowing menace into his voice to a carefully measured degree. "Are you aware that this is private property?"

The journalist smiles sweetly. With smugness. If only she were not so high profile, so connected with their cases and with Will through her ill-mannered pursuit of him, he would take a knife to those lips, that tongue. She is very deserving of a lesson in what ought and ought not be spoken. Hannibal is aware that he has a certain person bias in her case. If she had not chosen to go after Will, he would not have seen the vulgarity of her methods, might indeed have admired her audacity and style. But her death must be deferred. Even as satisfying as it might be, killing her would not be worth the risk.

"I didn't see any signs," she says.

"Is that a camera?" Will asks. The venom in his voice is... delightful. "Have you been taking *pictures* of my *house*?"

"Why, just of the landscape, Mr Graham. If your home happens to have sneaked into some of them, well, it is just so *picturesque* isn't it?"

Will makes a wounded noise, angry and bitter. Hannibal steps forward. He does not think that Will is in quite the right frame of mind that the annoyance of her presence could drive him to commit violence, and so he has no use for her presence here.

"Miss Lounds, you will leave now, or we shall be forced to report your trespassing. You have been warned now; you can no longer claim ignorance."

"As you wish." It is clear it matters little to her; she has what she came for. She turns with a flick of her hair; there is a car parked some way down the driveway. Hannibal makes sure to memorise the licence plate, for future reference.

They do go inside after that, but Freddie Lounds has quite ruined Will's mood, and he has little appetite. Even though he had not intended for this to be a date, Hannibal cannot help but feel angry that once again coincidence has interfered with his plans for Will. It really should not be so difficult to arrange a simple space of time in which he can enjoy them man's company.

It seems he shall simply have to somehow try harder.

A Date After Death

Chapter Summary

In which Hannibal Lecter finally gets the sex.

And also he is still a terrible person but shhhh, we'll pretend that in this universe he tells Will about the encephalitis and is slightly less of a jerk, and everything is puppies and ravenstags.

Chapter Notes

Urg, I haven't written porn in ages, I hope it isn't terrible.

Sending Will to Tobias is a calculated action. As with all calculations, the inherent risk has to be weighed and considered, assigned worth proportional to the expected outcomes and the benefits of the outcome he desires the most. Although Tobias has been very clear in stating his intentions towards any members of law enforcement that come after him, if he were truly capable of killing Will then Will was not the man Hannibal thought he was. And Will would not go alone – even with the inevitable deterioration in his mental condition he has more sense of self-preservation than that. From Hannibal's impression of Tobias the man has only before killed singly. He has little experience in facing numbers. Therefore, he is not truly worried.

When Tobias then arrives at his office, wounded yet living and claiming to have just killed two men, it strikes him that he may have made a grave miscalculation. The mere fact that he is here, set for one last confrontation before inevitable flight, means that things have not gone as Hannibal had wanted. Will had not shot him, had not cemented further his path down the dark road of Hannibal's designs, indeed might be dead himself. It is impossible to be certain without further information, and that is intolerable.

This fact of uncertainty alleviates nothing. He is aware of an unfamiliar depth of emotion. Of sorrow, quite foreign, and most unpleasant. Will had been – he has never been a creature in whom hope could sink its roots, to maintain the present tense – precious to him. An interesting foil, an investment of time and careful manipulation, a repository of affection even. Perhaps in time an equal and a companion.

In this moment, as with Schrodinger's cat Will is both alive and dead, and Hannibal finds he is angry. Will has been *taken* from him, and although irrational it feels like the latest in a line of insults foisted upon him by the universe itself, as though the fictional hand of fate

conspires to push them apart at every turn. The rudeness of the universe cannot be punished. The rudeness of Tobias Budge very much can be.

The violence that follows has the too-real quality of the unplanned, all light and sensation, fragments soaked in adrenaline to make them amenable to sorting into some kind of order. It is not the usual method of his kills, which sets him off his balance. Still, for all the speed, strength and youth that Tobias possesses, he does not have Hannibal's experience. His death is inevitable.

Hannibal does not escape without injury himself, but this works to his advantage. He cannot hide what has been done here, but it can be made believable by the wounds he bears. He leaves the body where it lies and limps to the chair behind his desk. Composing an appropriate reaction, considering syntax, content and vocal modulation, is done swiftly before he phones Jack Crawford to inform him of the situation.

He assesses himself during the wait that follows. His injuries are mild, a little blood, pain quickly put aside, no major damage. Even the puncture wound the knife has left in his leg will require only a few stitches. Psychologically it was both irritating and off-putting to have the sanctuary of his office invaded by this particular aspect of his life, forcing himself to kill twice without planning or pre-meditation, but it is a superficial disquiet that will pass before long. Of more consequence is Will. It is a little disturbing to become aware of how far the man has worked his way under his skin, past the armour of masks and facades, what Bedelia labelled both 'human veil' and 'person-suit'.

There is little in the mass of humanity that he values enough to be grieved by its passing. The banal, the simple, the unimaginative... little more than walking meat, a collection of transient electrical impulses predicatively responsive to certain stimuli. Insignificant, and not worth consideration or attention unless they acted in some egregious way that showed an inner flaw and ugliness that meant they were better removed from the world. Aesthetics and beauty are what elevates the species from insignificance, allows it to begin to think of rising above the level of animals. Will Graham does not meet these criteria by their most obvious definitions – although he is attractive in his own way, pleasing to the eye – but he has other unique qualities.

The loss of anything truly unique is always something to be mourned, but Hannibal finds it unsettling, the degree to which he would feel this for Will were it not for his habitual iron control keeping the emotion in check.

It is a relief then, when the undirected action of the universe affords him an unexpected boon, when Will Graham walks through the door to his office in Crawford's wake. Will's eyes flicker between individual moments of damage in the mess that has been made, and his eyes evince a guilt that quite becomes him.

"I was worried you were dead," Hannibal tells him, despite the uncomfortable truth of it, because its effect on Will is more important than any discomfort he himself might feel. Let Will see the depth of sincerity behind it; it only serves Hannibal's purposes more. The love of another is a burden, a chain of obligation that may drag down as easily as it buoys up.

Indeed a little too much emotion for Will to easily handle, by his lack of any reply save a shallow nod, a bare inclining of his head. Most people are open, sandpaper rough against the raw, exposed nerve of Will's empathy. Hannibal knows that it is no coincidence that Will is drawn to him, has begun to trust him so utterly despite the short time they have known each other. He shows little, becomes a blankness, calm, a mirror of sorts. Will finds this relaxing. It seduces him into opening up, and thus Hannibal insinuates himself a little further inside each time.

To make Will exactly like himself would be dull; he is no narcissist to desire a simple reflection. But whatever permutation of the monstrous eventually emerges from the chrysalis of Will's feverish imagination it will have his mark upon it. Hannibal wants to own Will, utterly, down to each flickering, firing neurone, each impulse of neurotransmitters, that strange alchemy that makes Will what he is. A constantly evolving work of art.

Love as defined by society is an alien emotion. Desire is much more apt. Hannibal desires with a great and aching hunger, rapacious in a way he acknowledges is dangerous. He risks much for his rewards, for Will might come to see the reality behind the mask at such a point that he still retains the presence of mind to turn him in, but even if not Hannibal has allowed himself to feel in a way he never really thought he was capable of. He has created in himself a vulnerability, but he has come too far now for regrets.

Jack Crawford has questions, of course, but they are easily deflected, for whatever lingering suspicions still remain. They will find only the answers Hannibal wishes them to find. Nothing more. Will settles beside him, leaning back against the desk. They are surrounded by a moment of quiet.

"I feel like I have... dragged you into my world," Will confesses. The irony is appreciated.

"I got here on my own," Hannibal replies. The truth again disarms. Will's gifts may be fooled when he does not want to look, but honesty still rings with a power the casual lies of the everyday do not. "But I appreciate the company."

Will meets his eyes; camaraderie wins a smile from him. It is born half from guilt, but also the connection that has been building between them over these weeks. There is a subtle tension that strings the air between them.

"I'm not exactly good company," Will says. "But if you'd like more of it, you could come back to my place after they're done with you. I can't imagine you'll want to stay here after what's happened."

"I would not want to impose..."

"You're not an imposition." There's a hint of colour in Will's cheeks.

There is a distinct scent of opportunity about this, and Hannibal has never been one to miss an opportunity. There is little left for which the FBI requires his presence, and soon enough he is sitting in the passenger seat of Will's Volvo on the hour's long drive to Wolf Trap, Virginia.

“I got distracted,” Will tells him. “I knew he was the killer, but... I had another hallucination. Like the one’s I’d been having when Alana came round. I thought I heard a car hit a dog in the street outside and I couldn’t... I couldn’t do nothing even though I *knew* it wasn’t real. Because of that two men are dead, and you nearly were.”

Hannibal has permitted Will to lend him some of his own clothes to change into, which is another calculated act. Will does not naturally spare much thought for style, and under normal circumstances Hannibal would never willingly wear anything so ill-fitting, cheap and bland. But to clothe another in your own garments is a very personal act. It is also a show of vulnerability on Hannibal’s part, and it puts Will at ease.

“You shouldn’t blame yourself too much,” he says. Will paces, jerky, as Hannibal does up the last buttons of the shirt. Plaid. Nearly intolerable. He would not sink so low, save that he has had enough of failed dates, thwarted intentions. He will use every tool available to make this work; it is the best opportunity he has yet had. He need only look at Will’s interaction with his dogs to see the nurturing part of him. Perhaps appealing to *that* will open up a new aspect in their relationship.

If manipulating Will were less important, had not become so vital, he might not try so hard to make it sexual when it has not come naturally. It is an act generally left to his whims; he has no strong feelings about it either way. However with Will, he must acknowledge that this would no longer hold true. It will be.... involved. But to emotionally compromise Will, to mark him in such a way, to create mental union through the physical... In order to make himself part of Will, down to his bones, he must take some part of Will into himself. Reciprocity. They will entangle their psyches until nothing is capable of rending them apart.

“How can I *not* blame myself?” Will says. “It’s my brain doing this. Seeing what I see... it’s starting to affect me more than I think I can handle.”

“I lay no blame at your feet. Tobias Budge is responsible for his own actions. Whatever he wanted with Franklin, I was merely incidental.”

“Those two policemen are still dead because of me though,” Will insists. “I should have warned them before we even got there.”

“You cannot change what has happened.”

Will’s hand tugs through his hair. Hannibal experiences the distinct urge to touch. He suspects those curls would be soft, silky. “I feel more and more unstable.”

Hannibal closes the distance between them. It is time to bring things to a head, and he has no intention of staying in these horrible clothes any longer than he has to. Better to see them on Will’s floor. He reaches out to lay a hand on the back of Will’s neck. “Let me be your stability.”

Will leans into him; he is touch-starved. But he would trust no one else enough not to shrug away. “Hannibal?”

It is simple, after everything, to lean in and press their lips together. Hannibal judges tenderness best for now – he may be rougher later. Will's mouth is dry, feverish, but it moistens as he licks his way inside. This close, the hot, sweet scent of him is like perfume on the air, speaking of what lurks within. Will makes small, pleased noises, hesitates then pulls him in closer. There is not much difference between their heights; the tilt of their necks is not uncomfortable.

"Isn't this a little unethical?" Will asks when they break apart momentarily. Yet there is no real heat behind his words. His breathing has sped up, his eyes are glazed. Hannibal can feel the flutter of his pulse against his thumb where he holds his neck.

"Do you want me to stop?"

"No."

Hannibal's fingers are sure, stripping Will swiftly. Will is less so; he fumbles, hasty, eager for touch and another body against his, for skin upon skin. There is little doubt that it has been some time since he last did this. By design they are in Will's bedroom – where better to change clothes? – and Hannibal turns them, pushes backwards so that Will must bend his knees to sit lest he fall onto the bed. Will gazes up at him, his tongue flicking out to wet his lips unconsciously as Hannibal slowly strips, intentionally putting on a show.

Most of this will be a show. On Hannibal's part, because it is habit to match himself to partners, and he does not yet know Will's tastes, and on Will's, because his empathy demands it, unless he is bold enough to ask a little something for himself.

Finally they are both naked, and Hannibal moves to straddle Will; pushes him back down onto the covers, an expanse of pale skin stretched over muscle. Will is surprisingly well-built, considering his occupation. It is... pleasing. Hannibal bends in close, nips lightly at the skin along Will's jaw, down his neck. Not hard enough to draw blood, although he wants to. Will writhes in pleasure, gasps quiet exclamations of "Oh, god, god, Hannibal." Their cocks meet in quick moments of sudden friction, teasing.

"Would you like me to fuck you Will?" Hannibal asks.

"Yes. God, yes!" Will is hazy with lust, drunk on dopamine and serotonin, a heady cocktail. He gestures to the table by the bed. "Lubricant in there, and condoms... but check the date. It's... been a while." He flushes suddenly with embarrassment, red seeping down over his chest. Hannibal finds it oddly attractive.

It is a pity to move to reach for what is needed, to sacrifice contact. Will is spread out beneath him like a sacrifice, his head tilted back to bare his throat in unconscious submission, his hands twisted in the sheets because otherwise he does not quite know what to do with them. They come up, reach to stroke the skin on Hannibal's thighs as he shifts his weight, stretching to open the drawer, circle lightly the area around the wound on the right, the neat black row of sutures.

"Like this?" Hannibal asks. "Or would you prefer it on your stomach?" The next time he will not ask, he will merely take, but first he must map the borders of Will's preferences. To do

otherwise would be... rude.

Will shakes his head, seems to come to a decision. He twists, muscles moving and bunching delightfully under skin, rearranging himself onto forearms and knees. “Just... fuck me like this,” he says, ducking low, his spine an elegant curve studded with the bosses of his vertebrae. “I want my head clear. I want to forget.”

Hannibal smiles. It is everything he could have wished for. This easy submission. He strokes Will’s back, comforting, grounding.

He prepares Will quickly, roughly, knowing now it will be wanted. Will arches and pushes into him, his cock hanging hard and flushed between his legs. He is dappled with sweat. Hannibal cannot help but lean in and lick it from the nape of his neck, tasting salt and Will. He does not let his eagerness master him, but he makes sure Will is still tight enough that it will burn when he finally pushes in. It is... wonderful.

He has to work his way in deep, short little thrusts that make Will give out gasping cries and rock back onto him. It takes control to be slow at first, to tease and make Will beg and curse him, to ask to be fucked harder, harder goddammit Hannibal, but he has never lacked for control. Will snarls, bucks against him, strong and lean, desperate.

When he has made Will wait long enough he finally lets go, gives in to the demands of his body, of that animal part of his hindbrain from whence springs his desire to own Will fully, utterly. This has been mechanical in the past – though the physical is still pleasurable, and a certain artistry can be found in the sexual act – but not so now. This man is *his*, and so he shows him this truth with the power of his body, with his teeth in the back of his neck, with his fingers leaving bruises on his hips, ignoring the pain of the recent wound in his thigh and the pull of the stitches. He gives Will all that he desires until he is driven to the edge and over it, spilling without even being touched.

Hannibal does not last much longer. With the faint tang of copper in his mouth he spends himself, subsiding in a controlled sprawl of limbs that fit into and beside Will’s upon the tangle of soiled sheets.

Will is already half-asleep, quickly drained. He makes no resistance as Hannibal arranges his body, tucking him into a possessive embrace. He does not usually care for such contact, but Will is *his* and he is loath to let him go. He feels the rise and fall of his chest wall, the soft beat of Will’s heart against his palm. Soothes the lightly broken skin at his nape with his tongue.

He drifts into sleep like that, with the scent of Will’s still fevered brain lulling him, and is content.

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